

Green Sense 11/03/2013

Getting There Greener

Are you going away over the holidays? If you are, you're not alone - the upcoming holidays are the busiest travel time of the year. Of course, all that traveling uses a lot of fuel and produces emissions from all those planes, trains, and automobiles. If you'd like to limit your travel impact, there are a number of aspects you can consider in a report called "Getting There Greener", by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS).

The UCS analysis shows that three key factors determine the environmental impact of your travel:

- 1. the type of vehicle you are taking;
- 2. the distance you are traveling; and
- 3. the number of people traveling with you.

Based on these factors, this guide (www.ucsusa.org/gettingtheregreener) can tell you how environmentally sound (or perhaps unsound) your travel plans are. Here is a summary of the top tips from the UCS:

A bus will get you there greener:

A couple boarding a motor coach will cut their carbon nearly in half compared with driving even a hybrid car. And with inter-state tour bus carriers bringing new luxuries to group trips, and new bus carriers bringing new coaches with perks like wireless internet access, taking a bus has become an attractive option.

An Internet search can find bus reservations on websites such as Orbitz, Expedia, Travelocity, or amtrak.com, but here are a few addresses from UCS to you get started: www.gotobus.com, www.greyhound.com, www.peterpanbus.com, and www.trailways.com.

Or, take the train:

On average, U.S. passenger trains emit approximately 0.43 pound of global warming pollution per passenger mile compared with 1.08 pounds for a typical car carrying a single person. Plus, train stations also often have the advantage of being closer to city centers, saving the extra expense, and carbon, of airport parking and long cab rides to key destination points.

Taking an airplane:

If you're flying, the report recommends avoiding first class and economy plus--which can up-to-double the carbon footprint of flying—and avoid indirect routes. If you can, choose airlines that offer coach-class seating exclusively.

For couples and solo travelers, a nonstop coach flight can beat the average car in the US. While air travel does produce a lot of emissions, emissions from cars and trucks add up, especially when those vehicles travel long distances and are only partially occupied. If you're traveling

alone or with one other person, especially for trips more than 500 miles, you'll usually lower your emissions flying direct in coach.

Take the best plane. The most efficient narrow-body jet produces 32 percent less carbon than the least-efficient version, and the most efficient regional jet produces 36 percent less. Appendix B of "Getting There Greener" and a little homework to find the model of plane available for your travel plans, provides you the information you need to be a fully-informed carbon shopper.

Avoid the most congested airports (such as New York City, Chicago's O'Hare, Washington, DC's Dulles, Newark and Philadelphia). Check regional airports with economy airlines flying nonstop to your destination. Airport delays result in big emissions - waiting to take off or circling in the air waiting to land.

Cars and carpooling:

If you want to take a vacation in the family car and don't own a fuel-efficient vehicle, think about renting one when driving on longer trips. Emissions from a large, inefficient SUV are nearly four times those of a high-mpg hybrid. If hybrids aren't available, efficient conventional cars can still reduce emissions while cutting your gas bill.

And time your trip wisely. Even if you're riding in a more efficient car, congestion fuel consumption can be double the rate at steady cruising speeds. Think about getting a GPS unit for your car that can help you avoid traffic jams in real time.

More passengers in your car reduces the per person emissions. Your per-person carbon footprint shrinks when you travel together, especially with fuel-efficient cars.

Analysts at the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) have found that with the right choices in our mode of transportation, we can plan a trip that is easier on both our wallets and the environment. Happy Travels!

A column by Reading Climate Committee member Gina Snyder